DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 032 114 PS 002 010

By-Johnston, Betty
Early Childhood Education in American Samoa, 1968.
American Samoa Dept. of Education, Pago, Pago.
Pub Date 68
Note-11p.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.65
Descriptors-Bilingual Students, Curriculum Development, Curriculum Evaluation, *Early Childhood Education, *Foreign Countries, Language Development, Learning Activities, *Pilot Projects, *Preschool Programs, Teacher Education, Teacher Workshops, Televised Instruction
Identifiers-*American Samoa

In 1968, a new phase of the total educational play for American Samoa aimed at increasing power in language and thinking. An in-school program, including a televised component was designed for all the 5-year-olds entering school in September. A curriculum was devised to encourage the use of the Samoan language. Materials were imported when commercially available products were too expensive or did not reflect Samoan culture. A pilot project with 15 Samoan 5-year-olds was conducted to determine the appropriateness of the curriculum materials, to observe the response of the children and their parents to the program, and to begin to train Samoans who would be teaching. The program was repeated using two groups of children who were observed by 111 Samoan teachers and assistant principals participating in the 5-week workshop. During August and part of September, 800 Samoan children who would be entering school, participated in the Early Childhood program. The groups averaged 15 in number and were taught by the teachers attending the workshop. Classroom activities were similar to the experimental programs. Early Childhood personnel guided teachers in conducting the successful program. It was felt that the majority of the teachers did a better than average job. The children responded well to the activities, curriculum materials, and the telecast. (JS)

ED032114

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OE EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

REPORT

ON

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

IN

AMERICAN SAMOA

1968

PS002010

Betty Johnston, Ed. D.
Department of Education
Government of American Samoa

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN AMERICAN SAMOA

Betty Johnston

A new phase of the total educational plan for American Samoa was initiated early in 1968 - a long-range program for the children below six years of age, aimed at increasing their power in language and thinking. It is now believed that a human being's mental power and ability to organize thought is significantly related to the quality of the environment of the first few years of life. If what has happened to a child in his early years has set his pattern and capacity for future learning - then it is upon this that the school builds. If the experiences have been marginal or damaging, the school is confronted with a remedial task from the first grade on. To be able to kindle a delight in learning during children's most formative years is a challenge and an accomplishment which could return more knowledge for less dollars than at any subsequent age level.

It was decided to begin with an in-school program, including a televised component, for all the five-year-old children who would be entering Level I in September 1968 and to utilize the classrooms of the existing elementary schools during the vacation period. Before this could be done, the following were necessary:

- choice of curriculum
- procurement of materials for learning
- selection and training of a Samoan television teacher
- testing of the total program with a live group of children
- training of classrooms teachers

All of the above, as well as the in-school program for the five-year-olds, have been accomplished as follows.

Choice of Curriculum

A study was made to tailor the curriculum content to both the culture and to what is known of language development and learning for all children, while at the same time to be realistic as to what might be accomplished in view of the geography, population and existing educational personnel and facilities.

The people of American Samoa require two languages - Samoan to relate to the culture and English to profit from education and economic development. Reports of principals and teachers indicate that most of the Samoan children entering Level I of the Consolidated Elementary Schools speak little or no English and what is probably more significant, speak very little Samoan. However, before moving to a second language, children need to develop a degree of power and confidence in the first. This can only be done by the children themselves through many experiences in listening and speaking, as gradually they develop an understanding of the constant relationship between words and the objects or ideas they represent. The richer and more varied the firsthand, sensory experiences, the greater is the meaning attached to words and, therefore, the more there is to think about and to talk about.

A curriculum was planned to stimulate the mind and encourage the

understanding and use of language. This required:

- emphasis on the development of oral/aural language (speaking and listening) in the language of the country (Samoan)
- use of language in functional natural conversation and discussion as children and teachers interacted with the environment and with each other.
- concrete, sensory, problem-finding/solving experiences
- opportunities to reproduce and talk about what was thought about in a variety of ways - painting, sculpturing, dancing, block-building, dramatic play.
- a class room climate free from fear and conducive to positive social and emotional growth

Much of children's learning depends upon their personal involvement. The curriculum requires not only adult planned experiences for concept development, rationed to the maturity of the child, but also unhurried periods of time in which children can talk together and with teachers as they explore their immediate world and recreate their experiences with paint, crayons, clay, scissors, dolls, housekeeping paraphernalia and building blocks.

Procurement of Materials and Equipment

Many indigenour materials - plants, seeds, shells - were used in a variety of ways for sensory perception of size, shape, color, sound, texture, as well as for specific items, such as coconut fronds for balls

and pinwheels - "pua" and "tifa" seeds, small cowrie shells and flowers for stringing - fau bark for strings - coconut and clam shells for doll dishes.

It was necessary to import some materials such as paper, poster paint, brushes, crayons, scissors, but some things important to Samoan children's learning were not available anywhere. These were planned and made locally, which proved to be well worth the effort, for not only were they "right" for Samoan children, but the total cost was cut by thousands of dollars. A description follows:

Books - In order to talk about pictures in a book, children need to identify with the content and the illustrations. Since there were no Samoan picture books at all, ten were planned and some 3000 printed on white index paper - a stock heavy enough to resist tearing. The pictures were drawings and photographs of Samoan people, animals, and village life. One was later made from unposed photographs of the children engaged in activities during the Pilot Study in May.

Dolls - As dolls manufactured by stateside houses do not resemble Polynesian children, over 150 fifteen inch washable dolls were made from sturdy golden-tan colored cloth and stuffed with nylon stockings (factory rejects). Facial features were embroidered and hair was made from wool. A small group from the Samoan Womens Cultural Association sewed the dolls - a formidable and much appreciated labor. The dolls were dressed in gay, removable cotton "lava lava" and "puletasi."

Wooden Figures - Miniature figures add imaginative dimensions to block building and story telling, however, there were no commercial ones available that resembled Polynesians and sets of animals contained many not found in Samoa. Templates of a Samoan family and the most prevalent animals were cut and over 1800 "stand-up" figures, ranging in height from two to six inches, were made from 3/4 inch plywood. Each set consisted of a mother, father, brother, sister and baby and their animals - dogs, cats, pigs, chickens, and an occasional horse.

Building Blocks - Blocks could be purchased stateside, but the cost added to freight charges prompted us to search out ways of having them made locally. Around 18,000 unit blocks - oblongs, squares and triangles - were cut from 2 x 3 inch lumber and some 700 nine inch "columns" from 3/4 inch doweling - particularly useful as posts in building child-size "fales" (Samoan houses supported by round posts).

Wooden Irons - To add to housekeeping play, 70 wooden irons were made.

Selection and Training of Samoan Television Teacher

A Samoan teacher was needed for the televised component of the in-school program, as well as for a continuing daily telecast to be beamed to all the young children in the villages. Elementary Principals were asked to recommend teachers and from this group twelve applied. Two auditions were held and were judged by five Samoan and five "palagi" (stateside) members of the Department of Education. A teacher was appointed in

PS002010

mid-April to work under the guidance of the Early Childhood personnel. Twenty telecasts from ten to twenty minutes in length were prepared to be used in the pilot study to follow.

Testing of Program - (May Pilot Study)

A study duplicating the projected classroom program for August-September was conducted in May to determine the appropriateness of the curriculum materials; to observe the response of the children and their parents to the total program; and to begin the training of five Samoan young men and women who would assist in the teacher education workshop to follow in June-July. Fifteen five-year-old Samoan children (the class size for the in-school program in August-September) within walking distance of the Au'a Consolidated School, where space had been made available in the lunch room half of the cooking fale, attended and were taught along with the teacher trainees by the Early Childhood personnel. The Samoan language was used throughout the children's program.

Since Samoan children had not been exposed to any of the classroom activities before, there was a question as to how they and their parents would respond. We were not prepared for the zest with which they entered into the activities. Unposed photographs taken in one hour and a half on the thirteenth day of the program are more eloquent than any words to describe their response. The oral language began to flow as the children talked about the picture books; described the flowers or leaves they had

brought to school; "ironed" the clothes and "cooked" for the baby dolls; built roads and fales for the people and animals; chatted about the pictures they were painting; and responded eagerly to the telecast. The children's daily attendance revealed their interest in going to school - only one child missed one day of the four weeks. The parents were amazingly responsive. They were invited to come at any time and they did. On the last day fathers, mothers, babies and grandparents were there, not for a "program," but to see a regular school day. They didn't want the school to stop - the children didn't want it to stop - and none of the teachers wanted it to stop.

The curriculum plan and content did indeed elicit oral language and thinking and would be used in the programs to follow.

Teacher Training Workshop

A five-week Early Childhood Training Workshop was held in June-July for 111 Samoan teachers and Assistant Principals (68 men - 43 Women) who would be teaching in the August-September program in the schools. Two new groups of five-year-old Samoan children were assembled so that the teachers could observe the total program from the beginning day. There could be many arguments against 55 observers in one classroom, but the advantages out-weighed the disadvantages. We were faced with enormous problems that demanded bold solutions. There were no suitable textbooks to turn to, nor could lecture-type teaching be effective. None of the 111 trainees had ever seen a program like the one they were soon to

teach, so mere words would have had little meaning. It seemed of paramount importance that live children and the best teaching techniques possible be observed each day.

The observers were seated quietly at one end of each large room (around 30' x 50') before the children entered. Records were kept of the daily activities, the children's behavior and teaching techniques, and were discussed each day after the children were dismissed. The children managed much better than might have been expected - they became so engrossed with the activities that they paid little attention to the adults.

Even though the training period was short, we felt it was successful. Children's changing behavior, teacher's techniques of solving problems and rooms arranged to encourage the use of a variety of materials were observed daily. The trainees were a part of a live program - they "read" a living book.

Early Childhood Program in the Elementary Schools

During August and part of September some 800 Samoan children, who would be entering Level 1 for the coming school year, attended the Early Childhood program. The groups averaged around fifteen in number, as planned, and were taught by the Samoan teachers who had attended the training workshop. The Samoan language was used and the classroom activities were similar to those of the preceding programs. Each day Early Childhood personnel spent from four to

five hours in a school, helping teachers early in the morning, observing children and teachers during the program and meeting with all the teachers and the Assistant Principal for discussion after the children were dismissed.

Considering the shortness of the training period and the newness of the program, the majority of the teachers did a better than average job. The children responded amazingly well to the activities, the curriculum materials and the telecast. Their painting, clay modeling, block building, dance, and dramatic play were vivid and creative. They re-lived their experiences in many ways and translated their ideas into new forms. The teachers made an effort to understand the children's behavior - the teacher-child relationships were good-children were not afraid to talk - they worked energetically in self-selected activities under the guidance, not directive of the teacher.

Discussion

What was only a dream last January has become a reality - books, dolls, blocks, irons, wooden toys have been made - paint, brushes, paper, crayons, clay, scissors, have been assembled; 111 Samoan teachers and Assistant Principals have had a beginning of training; and some 800 five-year-old Samoan children have been actively engaged in a program that did stimulate language and thinking. The most often repeated comment by parents and teachers was, "It wasn't long enough" and by children, "I want to go to school." One statement by a bus driver far out on the island sums it up. One morning, after unloading

the children, he took the trouble to go into the Principal's office and ask, "...what was going on, because all the years before when he took the children to school, they cried and didn't want to leave home, but now they didn't cry at all and couldn't wait to get to school." A remark of one teacher made our training effort worthwhile, "I used to get mad and hit the children, now I try to understand why they act like they do and I'm not mad any more and I don't hit. I'm glad."

From the viewpoint of Early Childhood personnel, the stages of the program carried out over the last nine months have been successful. It is clear that the Samoan parents and children and teachers respond and wish more. Twenty-five days of the Early Childhood program in all the schools have shown results that encourage the use of a full year. The total program, then, at a so-far cost of $45,000, has justified the faith of its initiators in its effectiveness to the degree that it become a permanent part of the American Samoa educational system.

We are now engaged in the implementation of a daily telecast beamed to all the young children of American Samoa, as well as planning the next steps - the four and five-year-olds in the Consolidated Schools as space and funds permit and the younger children in preschool programs in village fales.